

AN INTERVIEW WITH HUGH JAMES GALLAGHER:

A CONTRIBUTION TO A SURVEY OF LIFE AND STRUCTURES ON THE COMSTOCK

Interviewee: Hugh James Gallagher

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Description

Hugh James Gallagher's family has resided on the Comstock for more than three generations. He was born in Virginia City in 1920, the grandson of an Irish immigrant who died in an 1880 shaft accident at the Yellow Jacket mine.

Following graduation from the Fourth Ward School, Mr. Gallagher attended the University of Nevada, from which he received a B.A. in history in 1942. Upon returning from military service after World War II, he accepted a teaching appointment with the Storey County schools, becoming principal the following year. In 1955, Mr. Gallagher became superintendent of the Storey County School District, a position he held until his retirement in 1979.

In this oral history, Mr. Gallagher makes a valuable contribution to the record of life on the Comstock. Both his father and grandfather were employed in the mines, and the subject of mining figures prominently in the interview. Other topics include vignettes illustrative of community and neighborhood history, an account of changes in the nature of education in Virginia City, and some observations on the shifting economic fortunes of the Comstock over the last five decades.

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**AN INTERVIEW WITH HUGH JAMES GALLAGHER:
A CONTRIBUTION TO A SURVEY OF
LIFE AND STRUCTURES ON THE COMSTOCK**

PREPARED FOR THE STOREY COUNTY, NEVADA
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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An Oral History Conducted by Lucy Scheid
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University of Nevada Oral History Program

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PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber
Director, UNOHP
July 2012

ORIGINAL PREFACE

The University of Nevada Oral History Program (OHP) engages in systematic interviewing of persons who can provide firsthand descriptions of events, people and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are *not* history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiographical synthesization as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the OHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the OHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim

as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherency. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often totally unreadable and therefore a total waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the OHP will, in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled;

- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context; and

- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered

but have been added to render the text intelligible.

There will be readers who prefer to take their oral history straight, without even the minimal editing that occurred in the production of this text; they are directed to the tape recording.

Copies of all or part of this work and the tape recording from which it is derived are available from:

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INTRODUCTION

Hugh James Gallagher is a rarity—a member of a family that has resided on the Comstock for more than 3 generations. He was born in Virginia City in 1920, the grandson of an Irish immigrant who died in an 1880 shaft accident at the Yellow Jacket mine.

Following graduation from the Fourth Ward School, Mr. Gallagher attended the University of Nevada, from which he received a BA in history in 1942. Upon returning from military service after World War II he accepted a teaching appointment with the Storey County schools, becoming principal the following year. In 1955 Mr. Gallagher became superintendent of Storey County School District, a position he held until his retirement in 1979.

In this 1984 interview with Lucy Scheid, Hugh Gallagher makes a valuable contribution to the record of life on the Comstock. Both his father and grandfather were employed in the mines, and the subject of mining figures prominently in the interview. Other topics of interest include vignettes that are illustrative

of community and neighborhood history, an account of changes in the nature of education in Virginia City, and some observations on the shifting economic fortunes of the Comstock over the last 5 decades.



HUGH JAMES GALLAGHER
1986

AN INTERVIEW WITH HUGH JAMES GALLAGHER

Lucy Scheid: Where were you born and when?

Hugh James Gallagher: I was born on 17 July 1920 here in Virginia City on A Street affectionately known as Ophir Heights by those of us who grew up in that area: the Kendalls and the Cobbs and the Collettis and so forth. We used to refer to it in jest as Ophir Heights.

Why did you call it Ophir Heights?

Well, it's on the Ophir mine property up on the hill, and when we grew up heights were areas where those people of means used to live, so we used to joke about that and call the area Ophir Heights.

Was there mining or is there a pit back there?

No. The last shaft of the Ophir mine was located about 3 blocks down the hill. But there were glory holes and open-pit mines and small shafts just behind my house. For instance there's the Andes shaft and [other

shafts] all over this area. And you live with those things.

What are the full names of your parents?

My mother's name was Mary, and her maiden name was Haffey. My father's name was Hugh Gallagher. Mary Haffey was born and raised in Plumas County [California] area in Gibsonville; last time I was there about 20 years ago there was one house in Gibsonville. It's located about 8 miles from LaPort, about 25 miles from Johnsville, 35 miles from Quincy. It was a great mining area at one time, and her family was in the mining business there, working in the mines, and of course, they always looked at the Comstock. I'm sure they made trips over here, and that's probably how she got acquainted with my father.

My father was born in Gold Hill. His father, Neil Gallagher, came from Ireland by way of Pennsylvania. He evidently left [Ireland] during the potato famine and worked in coal mines in Pennsylvania. But

then the great magnetic pull, I guess—the Comstock—even reached to the East into Pennsylvania. He came to make his fortune on the Comstock— Gold Hill—and began raising his family.

He as a very young man—29 years of age—was killed in the Yellow Jacket mine in a shaft accident; he was a shaft man. They were always sinking the shaft; there were 4-compartment shafts in the mines. One compartment was always sinking, and they were sinking down below the 3000-foot level, and they were just ready to come up for dinner— they always came to the surface for dinner—and a cage was going up in another compartment with some steel on it— drills and so forth to be sharpened up on the surface. Evidently one of them—and this was an accident that was common in mines—got loose, hit the timber alongside the shaft, tipped all of that steel over and the small car that was on it. Tipped it down onto those men down below. There were 8 men working down there; 5 of them were killed outright, including my grandfather. One died the next day. Six out of those 8 men—one of the horrible accidents. That happened in 1880.

My grandfather was 29 years of age. He had 2 children at the time, one about 6 and one about 9 years of age.

Three weeks after that tragic accident my father was born, July 10, 1880. So my father and my grandmother of course had to find some means of livelihood. There was no social security at that time, no industrial insurance. They didn't even have life insurance. So just those little bits of remuneration that they would get from a very generous miners' union and the miners who worked with them was gone in a very short period of time. She started a boardinghouse and raised her family. My father got to the age where he could go to work in the mines; they would accept then in

there as young men 12, 14 years of age. [He] finished the eighth grade, and then he went to work in the mines to [help] support my mother and the other 2 children.

Where was your grandmother's boardinghouse?

In Gold Hill there's a monument, the Liberty Engine Company Volunteer Fire Department monument. It's just below there. The building is long gone, but that's where it was located, right on the main drag, above the business district of Gold Hill, which had banks and stock brokerages and things like that. That was a tremendous busy part of the Comstock in the 1880s.

What year did your grandfather come to this country?

I'm not sure. I had talked to my father on occasions about this, but my father passed away in 1948, and so a lot of the things that he told me have escaped me. But if he was 29 years of age when he lost his life, and he had been in Pennsylvania in the mines for a while, he must have been very young, probably a teenager when he came to the United States from the Great Emerald Isle. [laughter]

Neil Gallagher was about 9 years of age at the time my dad was born, and he had a sister, Elizabeth, about 6. When they reached the age where they could take care of themselves, they went to San Francisco, and my aunt had a job. I don't particularly remember what she did, but my uncle, Neil Gallagher, was a policeman; [he] retired as a police officer in San Francisco.

Then what did your father do?

My father worked around the mines; pretty near all his life he was a hoistman—

hoisting engineer. He would bring men and material up, run all the levers, and run the big hoisting equipment that brought those things up and down the mines. He did that all his life. He was very good at it; he was very proud of that type of work. He used to talk about running the big double drum steam hoist at the Con-Virginia mine. Back when I was a kid going down there and looking in awe [at] that tremendous piece of machinery, my dad in that cubicle up above, with just dials to tell him where that cage was, and the great responsibility that he had with men—bringing them up and down 3000 feet— and the confidence that they had to have in him. I was always in awe of him.

But he did that all his life, and 1942 when, of course, mining ceased here on the Comstock [because] the government closed everything down in the mine business—gold and silver mining—he left the Comstock for the first time in his life. Went to the Nevada-Massachusetts mine outside of Winnemucca. [That] was tungsten property, and tungsten was a strategic metal, [which] they needed [at] that time, and [he] ran hoist out there. I can remember coming back from the army on furloughs, coming up to see him at the Nevada-Massachusetts mine. Then he came back in on Social Security, and for his last years lived in Virginia City. He was never happy away from Virginia City and was glad to get back here.

When was the first time your father started working in the mines? What year?

He was born in 1880, and I would say that when he was about 13 or 14 years of age he began working in the mines. They would take young fellows into the mines at that time, work them around as trammers on the surface first and then gradually break them in. And

so it would be about 1893 or 1894 when he began working in the mines.

When did he marry your mother?

He married my mother in about 1906 or 1907. I have 2 older brothers. Neil, who is 11 years older than I am, lives here in Virginia City now and retired from the state of Nevada—in the state. Mervin, a younger brother who passed away about 15 years ago, was elected state mining inspector in Nevada for 16 years. So comparing those ages, I'm thinking that probably my mother and my dad married around 1905.

You told me before that your mother died soon after you were born.

Yes. I was 6 months old. My mother passed away in one of those strange illnesses, influenza or whatever they used to call it, that came along at that time that medical sciences knew little about. It was some sort of an epidemic at that—that was in January of 1921—and quite a few lost their life during that epidemic here in Virginia City.

And then you went to live with an aunt?

Yes. My dad had to farm me out because he had 2 boys, one 11 and one 9. He could keep them and even raise them, but a 6-month-old baby—that must have been out of the question. So he looked to his own family; his sister would have liked to have me in San Francisco, and I could've almost grown up in San Francisco, I guess. My mother had a sister in Sacramento, and I could've made it there. There [were] quite a few people in the family that would've liked to have had this little baby. But my mother's brother, Leonard Haffey, lived here in Virginia City, and so it

was my dad's choice that they could have me for a period of time until I was old enough where he could bring me back home and raise me with his other 2 sons. So, Len and Dorothy Haffey raised me till I was 10 years of age. And when I was 10 years of age, my dad brought me home and the 4 of us bached it, we used to call it—bachelors or bached it. I was broken into cooking and doing some housework and those things that we all had to spread around and do.

And that was in Virginia City?

This was right in Virginia City. Yes. Great life, too.

[laughter] Where did you go to grammar school?

I went to grammar school here. I started school at the First Ward School. This is located in the northern part of Virginia City. The building is long torn down. It's located now where Arco's gas station is.

I went to the first 3 years at the First Ward School and then the rest of the grades were going to school at the Fourth Ward School. They were the only 2 school buildings in Virginia City. They had schools in Gold Hill, but that was all there was in Virginia City. So then I went to the fourth grade at the Fourth Ward School.

Could you give me a description of the interior of the Fourth Ward School?

Well, of course, it's such a tremendous building, you know. And the mammoth size of it...it's so impressive. The big high ceilings, the expansive classrooms. That was the way houses were, the way businesses were, with high ceilings at that time, and so it fit in with

the architecture of the time. The building was built in 1876. Big huge classrooms with a stove in the center which would heat each individual room—no heat anywhere else in the building. The hallways were cold; that's where you kept your coats in corridors and so forth. The restrooms [had] no heat, and when I went to school there [were] probably 150 students in the building. The building was built for over 1000 students, so we really had the run of the place—4 storeys and only 150 students. Gee, it was a great place to go to school. Just [a] great place.

Do you remember any of your teachers that you had there?

Oh, yes. You don't forget fine teachers. Kate Quirk, who was first grade teacher. Jenny Somers. Irma Mosbek was a tremendous teacher. And later on when I came back here and was teaching and then was principal of the schools here, Irma Mosbek was still teaching here. And I felt a little uncomfortable and always in awe of her teaching and her methods and what she did, and then to be a supervisor, but it didn't bother Mrs. Mosbek at all; we always got along just great with her. There were elementary teachers that I had that I'm sure I'll always remember because they were so effective and just great. Not only great teachers, but great people as well.

What do you mean their methods were so effective?

The whole system was academically oriented in basic work. For instance in reading, it was strictly a phonics system. Later on we're going to get into a system where they go into sight reading and then they have a combination of phonics and sight. But [this] was strictly phonics. Mathematics was a drill

type of learning and was repetition over and over again, but something that you didn't forget as far as fractions and decimals. And their social sciences with their history and their government was given to you. And you knew they respected it so very much, and it meant so much to them and they wanted you to be a good citizen and understand your country and to love your country and be patriotic. With all of that behind it, it was a great way of teaching and was an easy way for learning.

Could you tell me some of the games you played as a child?

At Fourth Ward School there wasn't a playground. Just behind the school and in fact in front of the Chollar mine office there was a dirt road, and we used to play baseball down there—one-a-cat and two-a-cat—and that was at recess or noontime or before school or after school. They would throw out an old softball or a bat and we could go on and on with that forever, playing baseball.

Then underneath the porch there [were] areas for marbles, and we used to play marbles, and we never did seem to get tired of that. But whatever we had in the way of games and recreation was very simple, because the facilities we had were very simple as well, but we made the best out of them and enjoyed whatever we were doing.

And you went to high school at the Fourth Ward School?

I went to high school at the Fourth Ward. And at the end of my sophomore year, they decided to abandon it; they built a new school building down on the center of town. There were about 100 students rattling around in that big old building up there that was built

for over 1000 students. Couldn't justify the heating and the cost of maintenance and all of those things, so they built a smaller school. And so I started my junior year in the new school, as we called it.

And that was what year?

That was in 1936.

What did the new school look like?

Well, of course it was brick construction and much more modernistic in design and everything with the lower ceilings and the smaller classrooms and the plastered walls rather than tongue-and-groove cedar that we had in the Fourth Ward and it was very, very modern. We had inside restroom facilities, some new desks, and of course new furniture, and such things as radios that we didn't have before and other audio visual materials that we didn't have up there. So it was an entirely new experience, and that was modern education. [laughter] A graduate of modern education, 1937.

Where did they get the money to build the new high school?

It was a WPA project, and gee, they did it just at the right time. I look back on the building figures, and I believe the cost of it was \$31,000 or \$32,000. But they had bricklayers, and everyone, all skilled mechanics—bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers, whatever—all \$5.00 a day. Laborer, everybody got \$5.00 a day. And, of course, this was in the Depression, and they were happy to get it. And built just a fine building. The principal that they had was Mr. John Gilmartin; he passed away some years ago. But John Gilmartin had an insight on that [it] was the time to build, that

was the time to get out of the Fourth Ward School. He took care of the local financing through a bond issue, promoted it—it was successful—and paid it off in a hurry, and it didn't cost the taxpayers very much at all. It was a fine project.

Did many local people work on the new school?

Yes. The recruiting at that time for those projects first of all had to be done within the local community. Of course, there were some people—some mechanics—that they couldn't get here. Some plumbers, probably not carpenters, and so they had to go outside [for] them. But first choice was people in Virginia City. That was a big part of those public works projects.

In the early 1930s, what did people do for money? I know that this town was hit hard.

Well, surprisingly, this was a very good mining camp in the 1930s. Gold and silver mining is a good depression industry. And mining on the Comstock and the revival at that particular time...in the 1920s, the Comstock was down, about as low as it ever was outside of 1942-1946 when all mining [was] shut down. But in 1930, the Union mine was running, Con-Virginia was running, the Hale & Norcross, the Keystone, the New York, the Woodville, the Overland, just a lot of mines were operating on the Comstock. Not in the big way that they were going in the 1870s and 1880s, but they were working, and it wasn't all that bad a price for gold and silver at the time. The Comstock was a good mining camp in the 1930s. So everyone was connected with the mining industry; they had no tourism at that time, of course. Everything in the 1930s was derived from mining.

Do you remember the prices of gold or silver?

Well, of course, when Roosevelt became president of the United States, we went off the gold standard and where gold had been at \$20.00 an ounce, then it went up to \$35.00, and that's going to revive the mining camp. Although the Comstock is primarily silver—it runs about 20 parts silver to one part gold—the critical thing is silver. And silver didn't make that type of jump, but it does go along a little bit with the price of gold. If gold goes up, silver has a tendency to go up along with it. If gold goes down, then you get a tendency to come down in silver. Silver did go up a little bit, and the good price of gold made it all worthwhile.

Going back to 1920, the mining was really bad at that time. Could you tell me about it?

There wasn't much going on at all at that time. Silver was way down. It got down to well below the dollar, got down to 25¢ [or] 30¢ an ounce, and that was just a ridiculous price for silver. And gold, of course, was at \$20.00 where it had been for all those decades before, and there wasn't that much money available for investments; it takes a lot of money to go in and make developments in underground mining. In late 1920s, the Merger [Comstock Merger Mines Inc.] which was a large mill—it was the largest floatation mill in the world at that time—was down in American City, for the town out there. They built company houses. If you go out there now, you'll see the concrete foundations to a good part of the mill. It was a mammoth thing. As I said, it was rated as the largest floatation mill in the world at that particular time.

OK. Going back to the 1930s, how many people were in your graduating class?

I think in my graduating class there were 8 students.

How many people were in the town when you graduated?

I would say around 400 people in Virginia City at that time.

They were working mostly in the mines?

Yes. [There] was no other industry in town, nothing else but mining; they had to work in the mines. Later on, with better roads and better automobiles, and where transportation isn't a problem people are going to be able to work in Reno and Carson City and commute back and forth and live here. But in the 1930s that wasn't possible. So everything was connected with the mining industry, that's all.

What kind of businesses were here in the 1930s?

Well, it was a long way from what they had. I read someplace that in 1875, when they built the Fourth Ward School, that there were 40,000 people in Virginia City, 39 grocery stores, 19 butcher shops, 15 bakeries, 11 dairies, 5 daily newspapers, a railroad with 32 arrivals and departures— all of those things. But I'll tell you, the 1930s was a long way from that. As I recall, there were 3 grocery stores at the time: N. C. Prater Company—George Wilson operated that; Paul Giraudo had a grocery store; and Matty Gerbatz had a small grocery store. There was one butcher shop, as I recall. Bob White had a butcher shop located on C Street, between Sutton Avenue and Union Street. Those provided the basic sundries that we needed to survive.

They operated strictly on credit. That was a mining company; in a mining community they operated on credit. Buy their groceries, buy their drinks in a bar, or whatever. When payday, they came around and they paid their bill. And till the next payday you went in...I can remember going shopping for my dad and telling [them] what I was to pick up, and a ticket was made out, and that was put in a big register, alphabetical with the amount owed on the top piece. So they operated that way, and I'm sure they got stuck for a lot of it, but basically mining people were very, very honest and took care of those responsibilities.

Coal and wood were big items. There was no oil heat or gas heat in Virginia City, no furnaces. Everything was individual stoves. Louie Roth had the major wood and coal delivery system, delivered it to your home—blocks of coal. Paul Giraudo had a wood and coal delivery system. For instance, in my own home we had one stove in the kitchen. We didn't have any heat in the bedrooms or anything. And of course, the winters were cold here in Virginia City. But you live with that, and you get to learn how to stoke fires up in the evening so that when you get up in the morning you can run out and dress in the kitchen, and that's pretty much where you lived.. .right there. Except to go to bed, and you do that in a hurry, and you get out of there in a hurry.

What did Virginia City look like in the 1930s?

Well, there weren't any paved streets and very few automobiles; there were some automobiles, but not that many. Mining people didn't have the bucks, you might say, to own cars. If they did, it was one to a family—isn't something like we have now, 2 or 3 to a family. [There were] horses on the street; I can

remember the great horses that we used for the fires. The fire department used horses to take their hose carts and engines and things like that. Every morning, down the hill off by the Castle...beautiful grey horses. I was always impressed watching them run down B Street, then turn down Carson Street and prance up C Street; they knew they were show horses. Then back up by the Fourth Ward School, up over B Street and back home. They looked forward to that run every morning with Dave Tweedy or someone like that. I remember Dave Tweedy was one of the drivers and one of the firemen.

But we didn't have to look after automobiles for a lot of people, as we have to look out for coming down here today. You knew everyone in town. Mining people are very close, very friendly; they're very protective, not only of their children, but of their neighbors' children, of their mining friends' children. They look after them very, very closely, and they're very concerned about their welfare. So there were a lot of little family get-togethers, or little community get-togethers that were main sources of recreation that everyone enjoyed very much.

What did the buildings look like? I've heard different stories about how the buildings were really dilapidated.

Well, yes. In mining communities when there is *borrasca*—that's the situation where gold and silver go down, and the mine closes down—mining people just have to pick up and go to another mining camp. They have to go to Tonopah, Ely, Butte or someplace else because mostly mining people know mining and that's it. You have to get out in a hurry because again you don't have any unemployment compensation at that time, and you have to get a job, so you move. So they

would pick up their few belongings that they had, the critical belongings, and move out and leave homes. Businesses would take out what stock they thought they could get with them and just leave their buildings. So in a short while, with no preventive maintenance, the buildings become dilapidated and started falling down. No one to put them back, so there was that sort of thing where they have lost major buildings because of that situation where [for] an extended period of time there was no care for the building at all.

Could you name some of these buildings that fell in on themselves?

Wells Fargo building was one; it was located up on south C Street. Even the front part of it, as I remember it, fell down long before its time. But I can remember the front part which was beautiful. We used to tie horses up on the outside of it—pine post pillars out in front. Gee, today somebody would take care of that, probably build behind it. But that remained in disrepair and finally fell in... beautiful frontage. And Cole's Drug Store, and oh, so many other buildings. National Guard Hall, which was a 4-storey building. Just a beautiful building. Back end fell out on that one day...finally had to be torn down because it was a hazard, just because of neglect for the building. There was so much neglect of those buildings. That was the reason they lost so many of them.

I heard a rumor that in the 1930s there was a man who was running around town burning buildings. Is that true?

I remember a young boy; he used to live up by me. [laughter] Yes, his name was Bodie Mike because he was supposed to have torched Bodie, California, and he moved

to Virginia City and started some fires in Virginia City and scared people to death. And he lived up behind Piper's Opera House [which] was a tinderbox. He was such a nice little kid, but just liked to set things on fire. Maybe that's the person you're referring to.

What happened to Bodie Mike?

Finally moved away, and nobody missed him at all. [laughter] Everybody could sleep a little better at night, and they were glad to see Bodie leave.

[laughter] Do you know which buildings that he got to?

No, I don't offhand. But there were some that he torched, and some brush fires that he would get going, and there was just a maniac situation. With him [it was] a psychological thing...I guess he couldn't handle it; he couldn't help it, and there wasn't much help for young boys at that time. So he left, and nobody missed him. [laughter]

As a teenager, where did you hang out? Where was the place to go?

Oh, the place I remember was right down here on the corner: the Hungry Miner Cafe is there now and a laundromat...Jim McDevitt's. That's the place we used to hang out in the evenings. Jim McDevitt and Rosie McDevitt operated it and had a thousand and one stories every night that we used to sit around and listen to, and it was next to Evans's home. The Evanses were a large family—such great kids. Set up a volleyball net a few lots away, and we played volleyball till it got dark, and then under the streetlight in front of Jim McDevitt's we'd play kick-the-can or whatever till we'd get tired, then sit around and listen to Jim and

Rosie tell their tales, and so the North End Gang as it was called hung out in that area. And we looked forward to evenings down there.

How many were in this North End Gang?

[laughter] Oh, there were quite a few. Everyone that lived north of Sutton Avenue was there. And then, of course, in the wintertime we'd build a cabin up here on A and Carson Street, [a] 2-storey cabin the kids did themselves...built it, that is—the talented ones. Stole a little electricity off the power line and had lights in there and radios. [We would] go in there and play cards. It was called the North End Society Club. And there were about probably 25 or 30 of us involved in that thing, and around holidays—Thanksgiving, Christmas or Easter—we liked to have a little feast, so we would get out on the Carson River out at Dayton and some poor farmer's place and get a turkey or small pig or things like that and bring it back. And Millie Byrne, who was a very nice lady who lived close to the cabin and put up with us all those years, cooked that up for us and everything else—potatoes—and we'd sit around some evening around that holiday and have our own feast in there. But we had years and years of enjoyable evenings, close association in the cabin and at Jim McDevitt's.

How big was this cabin?

It was 2 storeys, but it was one room on the lower storey and one room on the top storey, and a ladder to go up to the upper storey which was the card-playing hall. Oh, we had card rooms on both floors. We would go to the city dump, which was located on the north end out here—people would throw away couches or old chairs or something—

and bring them back. We had some young men real handy that would fix them up and repair them, and so we had a whole cabin full of furniture.

Besides this cabin and the McDevitts' house where else did you go?

Well, that was about it in the wintertime. Of course [I was] involved in athletics—basketball—and that would take up your evenings [in practice] when you got a little older. And games on weekends, so that took up a good part of your winter.

Then at that time, young people used to enjoy outings to Bowers Mansion and even to Reno to Idlewild Park and things like that. They were simple things, but always were very enjoyable—good, wholesome, close fun.

Do you remember going to the movies anywhere in town?

They had a movie in the National Guard Hall. Yes, that was operated 2 or 3 nights a week; I remember that, yes. That was a place to go; I almost forgot about that. [laughter] And in later years, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the theater moved down to the Odd Fellows building, now where Grandma's Fudge is located. They had a little theater in there, and again it was a 2 or 3-night-a-week movie.

What were the 1940s like?

I missed the 1940s; I was away to school. I went to the University of Nevada in 1938, and I was away till 1942. Graduated in 1942, and then got a greeting from Uncle Sam that I had been drafted and spent 4 years in the army. So, for about 8 years I [was] away from Virginia City and would just get back once in a while

on a furlough, or get back on a weekend or during a vacation while I was going to school. But I didn't pay all that much attention to what was going on then; [I] had other things to think about. [laughter]

Tell me about your university years.

The university, when I went there, was small; I think there were 700 students at the University of Nevada when I arrived—1938. And I started taking some history courses because one of my high school teachers, Jake Lawlor—I thought a great deal of him, and he was a history major—and I thought, "Maybe I'd like to do that."

So I got into the history department; they just had a tremendous history department down there. Professor Dr. Hicks was head of the department. Dr. Hutchison I remember there. And Anatole Mazour—what a tremendous teacher. And C. C. Smith, although he was in political science he did have a lot of history courses. So I think that has a lot of direction for you, if you really have good professors and you really like it, you're ready to jump at it. And I did. So I stayed with history, majored in history at the university. It was a great department then. Great department.

And you did some graduate work?

I did some primarily because in Nevada when you're certified in teaching you have to go back every so often to pick up courses in your major or your minor field or in education or whatever, and so I'd go back every year or 2 or whatever, and I took some graduate work in history and, of course, in education. Enough to keep up the administrative credentials, and so forth. I enjoyed going back, too.

And then you went to war in 1942?

Yes, I went in the army in 1942; I returned in 1946.

What did you do in Virginia City then?

Well, when I was discharged in June of 1946, I was looking for a teaching job. That's all I knew, and I had graduated with teaching credentials in 1942 before the army picked me up. And I found that there was a teaching vacancy here in Virginia City. And so I told my dad that, "Gee, I'd like to teach up here. I don't have a job." I think at that time we were given \$20.00 a week sort of unemployment when you were discharged and my mustering-out pay was gone and everything. It was a 3-man high school board here; my dad knew them all and says, "Come on, we'll go see them."

Now, I know that isn't the way you go after a teaching position. You write up an application, and you give it to the superintendent, and you have interviews, but that isn't the way my dad thought it was, and I didn't argue with him at all. So we went around, and we saw the school board and Mr. Versal McBride and Al Jacobsen and Cecil Morrison, and they said, "Yes." The superintendent didn't know anything about it, but I had the job. [laughter] The superintendent was a friend of mine who I had gone to school with, Hank Clayton, and so in September, I started teaching school here and taught social studies. We only had 3 teachers in the high school, and 13 students, and the principal taught fulltime, of course. And I coached the basketball team, and at the end of that year, Hank Clayton got a job as superintendent in Yerington, and so they were without a principal for their high school. And so Al Jacobsen, who was clerk for the

school board, came to me and said, "Hey, we'd like to have you take that job. We'll give you a couple hundred dollars extra."

"Oh," I said, "You know I'm just a schoolteacher, Jake. I haven't had any experience or anything like that. That would scare me to death."

He said, "Just go on down there and do what you want, and we'll work it the way you want. If you get in trouble, then come see us, and we'll get you out of trouble."

So I got an extra \$200 the next year, and I became principal of their high school. And then brought in a basketball coach, and we went on from there. A few years later, the elementary school board... see, there were 3 school boards in the area at the time: there was a high school board of 3 people; there was an elementary school board of 3 people; there was a Gold Hill school board of 3 people. So a couple years later, the elementary school board asked me if I would like to be principal of the elementary school, and so I took that offer. Then in 1955 when [the] legislature decided to consolidate the 252 school districts in Nevada to 17, I was made the county superintendent and stayed with that until I retired in 1979.

How many people were in Virginia City when you first took your teaching job here?

Of course, that was right after the war, and there was a little bit of mining activity at that time, a little bit of open-pit mining down the Con-Chollar, and they were beginning to look at mining again. Oh, I would say there was probably 300 to 400 people—very small at that time. As I said, our high school only had 13 students then. I don't know how we got away with 3 teachers for just 13 students.

Did a lot of the kids that had left come back after the war?

Not so very many of them because there's not that many opportunities for young people in Virginia City. Virginia City is more of a retired place now, or an older place— people who pick Virginia City are people who are retired from something and want to get away from the hassle and from the hassle of business or of a job, and come and buy a small business in Virginia City and a small home, and live their last years in peace and quiet. That's the demographic picture I get pretty much of Virginia City. Nothing here really for young people, so not many of them returned. They went on to greener pastures and did other things. We still keep track of them. [laughter]

When did the tourist thing start?

Well, that would be around 1950. And that was when Virginia City was very fortunate in having some real professional writers and artists who took a liking to the great adventures and the stories of the Comstock and moved in here: Lucius Beebe; Walter Van Tilburg Clark; Roger Butterfield; Duncan Emrich, who was a curator of Library of Congress; the Katies—Katie Hillyer, Katie Best who wrote for *Good Housekeeping* and *Redbook* and *Cosmopolitan*, good magazines, you know. They were good writers, and they wrote about Virginia City and they wrote about the Comstock. Good artists like Cal Bromund, Lou Siegriest and Betty Larson. and they worked all over. That really started something because with that type of national exposure to good writers and good artists, people that would come to Reno and the lake..."We'll just get a little jaunt up there; and

we'll see what we were reading about, you know, in the national publications, and what we've been looking at."

So that really started the tourist business. In moved shops and in moved people and tour guides and so forth to take care of them, and it's been going great ever since.

Why do you think these artists and writers were attracted to Virginia City at that particular time?

Well, it's such a great story, and Lucius Beebe was a tremendous writer. He had the greatest command of our language of anybody I ever knew. Lucius was a railroader; that's all he was all his life. He came here to write a little story about Virginia & Truckee [Railroad]. Hooked his private car on—he could do that anywhere in the United States—put his private car on any train that was going anywhere. [He] ended up [and] just fell in love with Virginia City. [He] got into the V & T and then got into the Comstock itself and bought an old home over here and put hundreds of thousands of dollars into it, and this was where he was going to live. He wrote about it—he revived the *Territorial Enterprise* and made a tremendous newspaper out of that; it was a weekly. It had advertising from all over the world, too. He could do it.

And that's it. Once they hit Virginia City on an assignment and then started looking into things and started to hear this great story and to see some of the things—to see St. Mary's in the Mountains, the Fourth Ward School and the Castle—and to see these things, there were so many enchanting things they wanted to write [about]. And they did. So that really brought the tourists in here, and of course, the television program "Bonanza" didn't hurt at all. [laughter]

Do you remember any movies that were filmed here?

No, I don't. There was a movie titled *Virginia City*. I think Errol Flynn was in it, as I recall, but that was filmed in Hollywood. Of course, "Bonanza"—I guess, 90 percent of that was filmed in their studios; some of it was filmed up in Incline. A few small segments I understand were filmed around here. But they're starting to do some filming around here now, the television work that's interesting. "Believe It Or Not" is in a segment up here; "PM Magazine" has done several things, and so they're starting to do some of that now.

Where did Lucius Beebe live?

He lived up on A Street; it'd be A and Union Street. He bought the old Dan Connor home. Beebe's supposed to have put about \$250,000 into it. Beautiful yard around it and built a big beautiful swimming pool up behind it, and had a garage to take care of—he had a couple of Rolls Royces, an Oldsmobile, a Jaguar and a Jeep. [laughter]

He was a tremendous dresser; he appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine. We have it up here in the Delta under glass. Gee, what a dresser he was. This was at the time when he was back in Boston. But he would come downtown every evening to play roulette down at the Delta and have a few drinks. [He] and his partner, a photographer, Charles Clegg—wonderful photographer—and Lucius's dog, a St. Bernard about 4½ feet in height called T-Bone Towser. He was T-Bone because that's what Lucius used to feed him; he was the neatest dog. But they were an impressive sight. People would look forward to seeing him and watch him

gamble. He was a first-rate gambler—put his money on the table and made his bets. He was quite an attraction around here for a while.

When did he leave?

He left—I'm just making a guess now—I'd say Lucius was here probably around 8 years, and then his health started to tail a little bit. He had another home down in Hillsborough, California, and he used to go back and forth. But then he started spending more time down in Hillsborough and finally stayed down there. He passed away, and since then his property has been sold up here.

Who owns it now?

Mrs. Schaffer who has the Mark Twain museum and has purchased that property.

When did gambling start up here?

Well, as soon as gambling was legalized—it was in the 1930s, but as soon as it was legalized it opened up. There was always gambling here, I'm sure, in back rooms—you know, poker, pan....

What kind of game is that?

Pan? Oh my, that's the game. It's played with 7 decks of cards—something like a gin rummy game, but it's a little more than that. The game's kind of a disease when it [is] started. But there were always games like that played in back rooms. Then when gambling was legalized, it opened up a little more. Now, of course, it's pretty near all slot machines because that's what tourists are looking at, and that's what they like to play.

In the 1950s, how many people were in town?

Well, there was some growth just to take care of the tourists that were hitting here in increasing numbers every year. It was a small growth; most of the growth was in outlying district Virginia Highlands opened up out here on the top of the grade—that's a beautiful area out there; Mark Twain Estates, which is located at the bottom of Six Mile Canyon—that opened up. so the growth was in those areas. In Virginia City itself, there was in the 1950s practically no building of houses because banks and savings and loan companies have always considered mining and tourism as unstable industries, I guess. So you really couldn't borrow a nickel. But then after 1960 that changed. They looked at it in a different light, and money became available for low-income housing. And there was some of that around here. Then some developers came in and built some houses, and a number of new houses built around here since that time down in the eastern part of the city and up on the Divide. But during the 1950s, very little growth because of that lack of money available for building houses.

In the 1960s, why do you think people started pumping money into the town?

Well, it was a new outlook that banks and savings and loans had taken, and there were government guarantees for mortgages and things of that nature. so money did loosen up so that they could purchase homes up here, which makes sense. The no-loan business of the 1950s—they couldn't see that at all. There were just so very few people who were connected with mining at that time. Of course, there were a lot connected with tourism, but you have to look ahead, and tourism is going to be with us a long time:

it's as stable as any industry you can get. I know Reno and Tahoe feel that way now. There's plenty of money available down there for those high-rise casinos they're putting in. They're counting on tourism for a long time—and expanded tourism. So I think that they change their philosophy, and that's why there's money available.

What were some of the first tourist attractions that opened here?

I think just walking down the few blocks down C Street—the Crystal Bar, as it's such a great place even today. That place goes back to the 1860s, and they still have those beautiful chandeliers and the glasswork and everything else there; so you could get the atmosphere of the Comstock by going in there. And the Bucket of Blood and the Delta Saloon—a few places are good. Then St. Mary's in the Mountains, St. Paul's Episcopal Church—they were available to go into. And the Castle; I guess that was the only home that had tours at that time. Others have opened up since, but that was [what was] available at that time. So probably it was an hour's stay at that time, where now it is expanded to a full day's stay if you want to soak it all in.

Were most of the businesses owned by local people or by people who had recently moved to Virginia City?

People, of course, had moved in and bought places. I think I mentioned before that there are a number of people that are in business in Virginia City who were tired of everything that they'd had before and wanted to settle down a little bit, and bought small businesses in Virginia City. They're locally owned to the extent that those people now live here. They're not here all year round. The

winters are sometimes harsh, and so it gives these people an opportunity to get out for a few months and buy the things that they're going to have for next season and so forth, and a little diversion—a little vacation. So it's a great business life for those people who you might say are semi retired.

During the really hard times when the mines shut down in the 1940s why did people move away? There was a constant population of 300-400 people pretty much.

Well, mining was the only industry, and that's all people understand when they're in the mining business. There isn't any other industry to go to, and so they move off into some other area where there is mining; that's the way mining people are. So somebody moves into Virginia City in those mining days, and "Where'd you come from? Butte?"—or Tonopah, or Ely, or Hamilton, or Sonora or Grass Valley. You'd hit one of them because they just stayed in the mining business and moved as bonanza and *borrasca* hit their camp and showed up in another camp. They were constantly on the move.

What are some of the biggest changes in education that you've seen during your years as superintendent?

Well, one big change is school boards. See, when I started out, I had 3 people on the board; we were very friendly. I called them by their first name. Cecil Morrison—he was always Cec to me; Al Jacobsen was always Jake; Versal McBride was always Mac. But their idea of it as a school board running at that time, I think I mentioned before, was "Hey, go on down there and do what you have to do to run that thing. Now you've said you've gone to school and you've got some credentials for it, [so] go

on down there and do the right thing. If you get in trouble, let us know and we'll bail you out." That's just the way my relationship was with them for all of those years.

They rarely had a meeting. They didn't want [to]. There were some papers that they had me sign; there were some vouchers to pay salaries and things like that. So they would say, "Well, bring them around and we'll sign them." So I used to...at the end of the month, I would do that. Versal McBride owned the Bucket of Blood. So I knew that if I go in there in the morning Mac won't be too busy, and I'd go in there and Mac would sign the vouchers. I knew if I went in to Cecil Morrison, [who] was an assayer on C Street, that Cecil would put down his furnaces about 10:30 and had to wait till things would cool off before he could work his samples. I'd go in there about 10:45, and Cec would sign it. I'd go to Al Jacobsen's home or if he was downtown, probably playing solo down at Bronco's, I'd wait until Jake was a dummy in the hand; Jake would reach over and sign these vouchers, and that's the way they put it all in my hands.

They had to have a meeting sometimes—a budget meeting—because it was required by law. No one ever attended the meetings; there was nobody in the press ever there. I would say that the first 20 some years that I was principal and superintendent there was never a soul at a school board meeting, and now, man, it's an extravaganza. First, there's an open meeting law now; you have to have an agenda published, and you have to have people there. Everybody has to be at their very best, and that's a tremendous strain. That relationship that I had with the board was something that I cherished; I saw how things were changing, and that's why I was glad to get out.

I recall, if I might tell this story, Al Jacobsen. He was the legislative auditor for

the state of Nevada; just such a tremendous man. People used to take their troubles to him or ask him things because he had such a tremendous mind, particularly with finances and taxes and things like that. Someone, a parent, would come to Jake and say, “Hey, look, my kid come home and I saw it on the report card—he got a D on the report card. He didn’t have a book in American government. That was the reason he got that D on there.”

Well, Jake used to tell them, “Hey, you go down there, and you tell Gallagher just what you’ve told me. We’re paying him plenty of money to see that that thing doesn’t happen. [laughter] If he doesn’t satisfy you or if he doesn’t give you an explanation within a reasonable length of time, you come back and you tell me. Then I’ll go down there, and I’ll talk to Gallagher. He knows I’d better not come down there too often.” [laughter]

But now, of course, parents take their complaints to the school board members, and [the] first time the superintendent or the administrator hears about it is in a school board meeting with the place packed with people and media people there and everything else and hit you cold. It was never that way. I think that’s a big shame.

There’s some other changes, too. One of the changes, and I’ve never been able to really live with it, is students—their language. I haven’t been able to accept bad language in mixed groups. I have been able to take all the other things they handled as they grow up. But I could never handle that one. It was coming on, and there was a strife there that I was having with them primarily because that was the way they were living at that time, but I just couldn’t accept it. I wasn’t about to. That’s a big change.

I think another change, and this is working out all right but it just came to my mind—dress—of teachers. When I came on

the job in 1946, I just got out of the army and I went to Oakland where I was discharged, and because I knew I was going to have this job I bought a suit. I paid \$20 for it; it had 2 pair of pants. I came up here, and I had 2 pair of pants, and I wore that suit for all year long, I’ll tell you. Took [those] pants out to 24 hours service or something like that, and occasionally I’d get the rest of the thing. Finally I remember about 6 months after school started I went to the principal, Hank Clayton, and I said, “Hank, would it be all right if I wore a sports coat with these 2 pair of pants? And with my tie?”

And Hank looked at me for a while and he said, “Well, yes, I guess it’s going to be all right.”

But it wasn’t; he was kind of leery of that. But anyway, I never went to school or was around students that I didn’t have a necktie on or I didn’t have a best suit or a sports outfit on. All that’s changed now. I see teachers today, men teachers, with a pocket T-shirt on and old jeans and stuff like that. That’s a tremendous change.

Several years ago, oh, maybe 10 years ago, a teacher we had by the name of Charlotte Jackson, I remember she came to me one time and she said, “Would it be all right if we wore”—she had talked to the other lady teachers—“slack suits instead of dresses?”

I says, “Oh, I don’t know, Charlotte, about that.” I was like Clayton; I was going to have to think about that for a while. Now, lady teachers wear old jeans and sneakers—such a big change. They say that they get a little closer to the students when they do that, and they kind of come down to their particular level, and that’s all right. But that’s a tremendous change for me. [laughter] That’s part of getting old.

Have teaching methods changed a great deal?

No. They don't change. Good teachers 100 years ago and good teachers today, they still use good teaching methods and good sound techniques and work at it. That's what it is—working at it. Teachers who want to put in 5½ hours in the classroom and don't want to prepare and don't want to make up lesson plans because they think that goes back to college days, no, they're not going to be all that successful. But the good teachers, after 30 or 35 years, still make out their lesson plans. They use methods and techniques that have been tested and tried. They understand students; they're sympathetic towards students and their problems and want to help them individually. So it doesn't change at all.

Could you tell me something about some of the fraternal or social clubs that you joined?

I belonged to the Fraternal Order of the Eagles up here at one time. Let's see, I still belong to the American Legion; I belong to the Storey County Volunteer Fire Department. I was about a 25-year active member; now I'm an honorary member—they farmed me out. They're such a great organization, I'm glad that I still have some part with them. Gee, that's about it.

Could you tell me about the buildings where some of these meetings were held?

Well, the Eagles lodge used to meet in the Eagles hall, which is the Miners' Union Hall located on B Street next to the Knights of Pythias Hall, between Sutton Avenue and Union Street. The volunteer fire department, when I first joined them, met up where the fire museum is now on C Street, up in the center of town; now, of course, they meet in their firehouse. And the American Legion, at one time, had an American Legion Hall,

located in the center of town. Then [after the] fire they didn't rebuild it. [They] later sold the lot and would usually meet in the school or some place like that.

Can you tell me when the red light district disappeared?

Well, it went up and down with mining. Because their clientele are miners, so the more miners, the more active that area would be. But I can remember just one block between Sutton Avenue and Union Street where they were located, and when I was growing up there were several houses. I never did think it was an extensive area at all. We never paid any attention to it; it was there, it seemed to be part of Virginia City as anything else is, and we didn't pay that much attention to it. I guess that some come in or some moved. We paid little attention to all of that. But I think that during the war in 1942, it was closed down, as I understand it. The army, because of their facility at Stead, closed down the brothels all around here in Reno and Carson, and had an influence in closing this one down as well. It stayed down.

Then all the buildings disappeared in 1942?

A couple of the buildings are still down there. I think there's one, probably 2 of the buildings. Again, because of disrepair and lack of maintenance and just ignoring it, they'd fall down or somebody would use part of it for firewood, and in a few years it just disappears— just obliterated.

What year were you married?

I was married in 1943. Married Lola McCarthy who I went to school with here in Virginia City. Her family was from Virginia

City. Her family was Nulty. Jim Nulty was conductor on the Virginia & Truckee Railroad in the early 1900s. And so she was a Comstocker. On a furlough from the army, we got married in 1943.

And how many children do you have?

We have 3 children: Hugh, Jr. is about 35 years of age [and] a controller at the Comstock Casino and Hotel in Reno; Barbara, who's about 29, is a science teacher at Douglas County High School in Gardnerville [and] Bob, who's about 26, is social science teacher and basketball and baseball coach in Elko County High School in Elko.

PHOTOGRAPHS



The Fourth Ward School built in 1876 with “big huge classrooms with a stove in the center which would heat each individual room... was a great place to go to school.”



Built in 1936, the Virginia City High School was a WPA project.



Hugh Gallagher Elementary School is named for Hugh James Gallagher.

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